

# Syria Update: December 23-30, 2014

**1** December 26: The commander of the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade reportedly turned himself in to the Dar al-'Adl Shari'a court in Dera'a Province in compliance with an agreement concluded with JN. Both sides had agreed to a mediation effort led by Harakat al-Muthana al-Islamiyya through the Dar al-'Adl Shari'a Court after JN attacked the Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade following reports of its defection to ISIS.

**2** December 29: ISIS bombarded regime checkpoints near the town of al-Sebheyyi east of al-Safira and the officers housing area in the town of al-Waha near the Safira defense factories.

**3** December 23: JN seized the headquarters of a local rebel group named Liwa Uqab al-Islam in the northeastern countryside of Hama Province after the group pledged allegiance to ISIS. The group's commander reportedly escaped to ISIS-held terrain in the eastern countryside of Homs Province.

**4** December 25: Five major military factions in Aleppo city, including the Islamic Front, Jaysh al-Mujahideen, and Harakat Nour al-Din al-Zenki, united in a new military command entitled the "Sham Front." The front is led by Liwa al-Tawhid commander Abdul-Aziz al-Salama, who is also the general commander for Islamic Front forces in Aleppo Province.

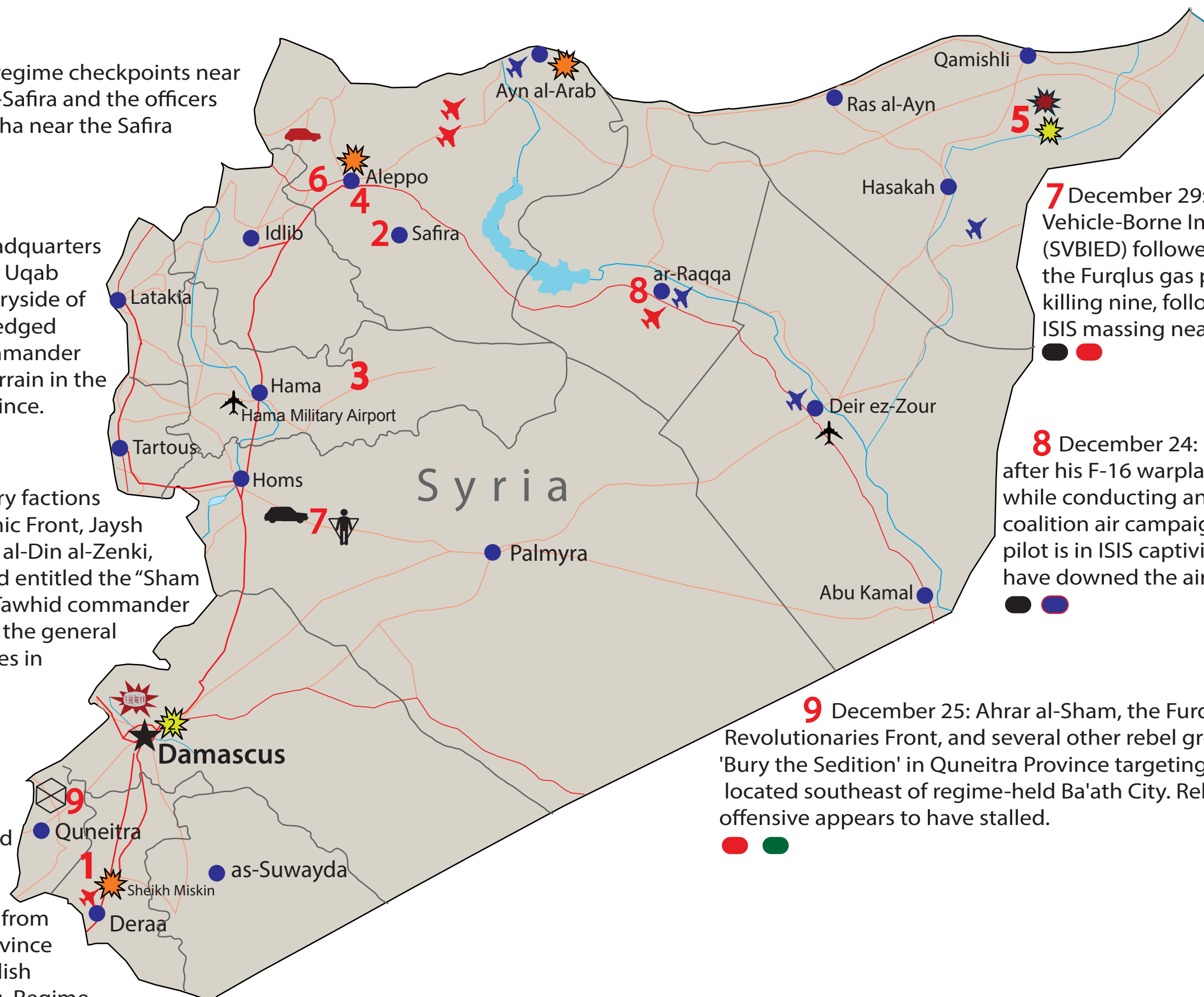
**5** December 24 – 25: ISIS forces clashed with both Kurdish YPG and regime NDF forces southeast of Qamishli in Hasaka Province. This occurred amid an ISIS withdrawal from Iraq into southeastern Hasaka Province following heavy clashes with Kurdish Peshmerga forces in northern Iraq. Regime forces allegedly used chlorine gas along with heavy bombardment to prevent an ISIS seizure of villages near Qamishli.

**6** December 30: JN seized a Harakat Hazm headquarters in the Kafar Karmin area in the western countryside of Aleppo after releasing a statement on December 25 accusing Harakat Hazm of being a "client group" that promotes "western interests" and stating that it has worked to sabotage JN operations in Idlib and Aleppo. In addition, JN rejected the De Mistura "freeze plan" for Aleppo City.

**7** December 29: ISIS detonated a Suicide Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device (SVBIED) followed by a Suicide Vest (SVEST) at the Furqlus gas plant in eastern Homs Province, killing nine, following unconfirmed reports of ISIS massing near the town of al-Sukhna

**8** December 24: ISIS captured a Jordanian pilot after his F-16 warplane crashed near ar-Raqqa city while conducting an overflight for the anti-ISIS coalition air campaign. U.S. CENTCOM confirmed the pilot is in ISIS captivity and denied an ISIS claim to have downed the aircraft with surface-to-air fire.

**9** December 25: Ahrar al-Sham, the Furqan Brigades, the Syrian Revolutionaries Front, and several other rebel groups announced the Battle of 'Bury the Sedition' in Quneitra Province targeting the regime-held town of Jaba, located southeast of regime-held Ba'ath City. Rebels made initial gains, but the offensive appears to have stalled.



- Opposition Forces
- Pro-Regime Forces
- ISIS
- YPG
- U.S.-Led Coalition
- Jabhat al-Nusra (JN)
- SVBIED
- SVEST
- Named Operation
- Major Clash

- Background Kinetic Activity**
- Anti-ISIS Coalition Airstrikes
  - Major Regime Airstrikes
  - Alleged Chlorine Gas Attack
  - Low-level clashes
  - VBIED
  - Major Barrel Bomb Attack



Content: Jennifer Cafarella  
Graphics: Brian Fisher

**ISIS Mobilizes in Northern and Central Syria:** ISIS forces in northern and central Syria appear to be mobilizing as ISIS fighters ousted by the Iraqi Peshmerga from areas in Iraq's Ninewa Province attempt to regroup in Hasaka Province. ISIS bombardment of regime positions southeast of Aleppo City near Safira may seek to test regime defenses in the area, yet likely also serve as cover for an ISIS mobilization, possibly in preparation for a final assault against the besieged Kuweiris military airbase. Meanwhile, the reported growing ISIS presence near al-Sukhna, east of Palmyra in Homs Province, follows a gradual build-up of ISIS presence in the eastern countryside of Homs. Repeated attacks against regime gas facilities in this zone serve to fix regime forces away from other crucial terrain and may serve as a shaping operation for a future ISIS attack against military targets east of Homs city, including the Tayfor Military Airbase and the heavily fortified regime stronghold of Palmyra.

**Rebel Forces Unify in Aleppo:** The unification of major military factions in Aleppo City into the Sham Front is a crucial step forward in the continued defense of Aleppo City by rebel forces. Including both prominent FSA affiliates and the Islamic Front, the Sham Front is also a key achievement for the Revolutionary Command Council by uniting local forces in an attempt to increase the effectiveness of coordinated military operations. The Sham Front's establishment follows the formation of a wider "Joint Aleppo Operations Room" and therefore bolsters a growing effort to strengthen rebel unity in the defense of the city. While JN and its primary Salafi-Jihadist ally Jabhat Ansar al-Din are not signatories to either of these structures, they continue to contribute key military efforts to the rebel defense of the city. The increasing consolidation of rebel forces is therefore unlikely to sideline either of these elements in the short term.

**Regime Forces Defend Remaining Stronghold in Quneitra:** Regime forces continue to be successful in defending remaining regime-held terrain in the northeastern corner of Quneitra Province. While rebel forces have seized wide swaths of the province since early September 2014, regime forces appear to have drawn a stable defensive line at al-Ba'ath City and its surrounding countryside.